

TRANSFORMATION OF MAIN BOULEVARD, GULBERG, LAHORE: From Residential to Commercial

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ABSTRACT

Globally, urban growth rates show no signs of slowing down, due to problems attributed to increasing population members. As a result, cities have changed from small, isolated centers to large, inter-connected economic, physical, and environmental locales. Lahore, once famous for its gardens, is facing the growing problem of urban sprawl, resulting in mushrooming of shopping plazas, traffic congestion, loss of open spaces. The city has become a hot bed of multinational companies, banks, telecommunication companies and international food chains. Huge investments, particularly after 9/11, have targeted Lahore and major roads have become gigantic construction sites. Gulberg, once a high class residential area gave way to rampant commercialization and its Main Boulevard paved the way for offices and plazas.

This temporal and spatial dimensions of the land use change from the residential to commercial are little known. The policymakers and public continue to raise concerns about the effects that unchecked transformation of the city landscape inculcates. It is not until we study this metamorphosis from a spatial perspective responding to commercial from residential that have occurred that the impacts of changes to come can be predicted. Without having a clear understanding of these changes, it would be impossible to improve quality of city life. The objective of this research paper is to record these changes for the professionals and policy makers as guidelines. The study of historical perspective

and existing information would be beneficial in formulating sound policies for guiding environmentally sustainable growth.

INTRODUCTION

A city is a fragment of the national fabric. It captures, undoubtedly in a heightened form, basic elements of both the continuity and change in a society¹.

Urbanization is a worldwide phenomenon, and there is hardly a city that is not hard pressed to accommodate swelling populations. Lahore, heart of Pakistan, like all prosperous cities extended far beyond its wall city limits. During British Period (1848-1947), Lahore for the very first time spilled over the fortified walls. Civil lines, the Cantonment, and the Model Town were developed to house the elite class segregated from the local population. Lahore Improvement Trust (LIT) soon after its inception in 1936 started preparing a Master Plan for the future development of Lahore. However, due to the Second World War task could not be accomplished.

After Independence in 1947, there was brisk building activity in Lahore to accommodate migrants. Many schemes had to be launched to meet the housing shortage. From 1947-1958 there was brisk building activity in Lahore and new colonies sprang upon the outskirts, notably Gulberg, Shad Bagh, Chauburji, Wahdat Colony etc². The Gulberg region is included in the triangle formed by the railway line, Ferozpur Road, and the Lower

1 Qadeer, M.A. (1983) "Lahore: Urban Development in the Third World", Vanguard Books Ltd. Lahore. pp.44.

2 Ibid.

Bari Doab Canal comprising Gulberg Colony, Guru Mangat and Mian Mir.

DEVELOPMENT OF GULBERG SCHEME

Planning concept of Gulberg has been derived from the Garden City Movement as indicated by the meaning "flower-tree"; a hybrid of two Urdu words. Spanning over an area of about 2, 368 acres it was developed in five phases: Gulberg I, II, III, IV, V covering an area of 126, 448, 1653, 85 and 56 acres respectively³. Gulberg was planned by S.A. Rahim, Chairman Lahore Improvement Trust during 1950-1954 for the modern affluent as a low-density spaciouly laid-out housing scheme.

Composed of detached bungalows ranging from 12-8-6-2 Kanals with the minimum of 7 Marlas along with adequate provision for schools, hospitals, parks, open spaces, cinemas, shopping facilities [Figure 1]. Physical design and service standards of the scheme had an aura of western suburbia, modernity and high status, though without the

imperial grandeur. Main Market and Liberty Market constructed around 1954 and 1967 respectively provided an ever expanding shopping facility with a variety of shops [Figure 3-a, b]. United Christain Hospital (U.C.H.) constructed during 1961-1965, Home Economics College in 1955 were the salient features of the area.

MAIN BOULEVARD FROM 1952 TO 1980

"Boulevard" literally means a walk on the walls of a fortified town, the word going back to the German Bollwerk (bulwark)⁴. The word changed in French from "bollewer" to "boulever" and, ultimately, to "boulevard." Originated in Europe and grandly imported to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century boulevard made its appearance in Lahore when Mall Road was laid down in 1851. Based upon the same concept, linear Main Boulevard, 200 ft. wide and 2.70 km was developed as the most distinctive feature of the Gulberg scheme [Figure 4-a, b]. Initially, it spanned between the

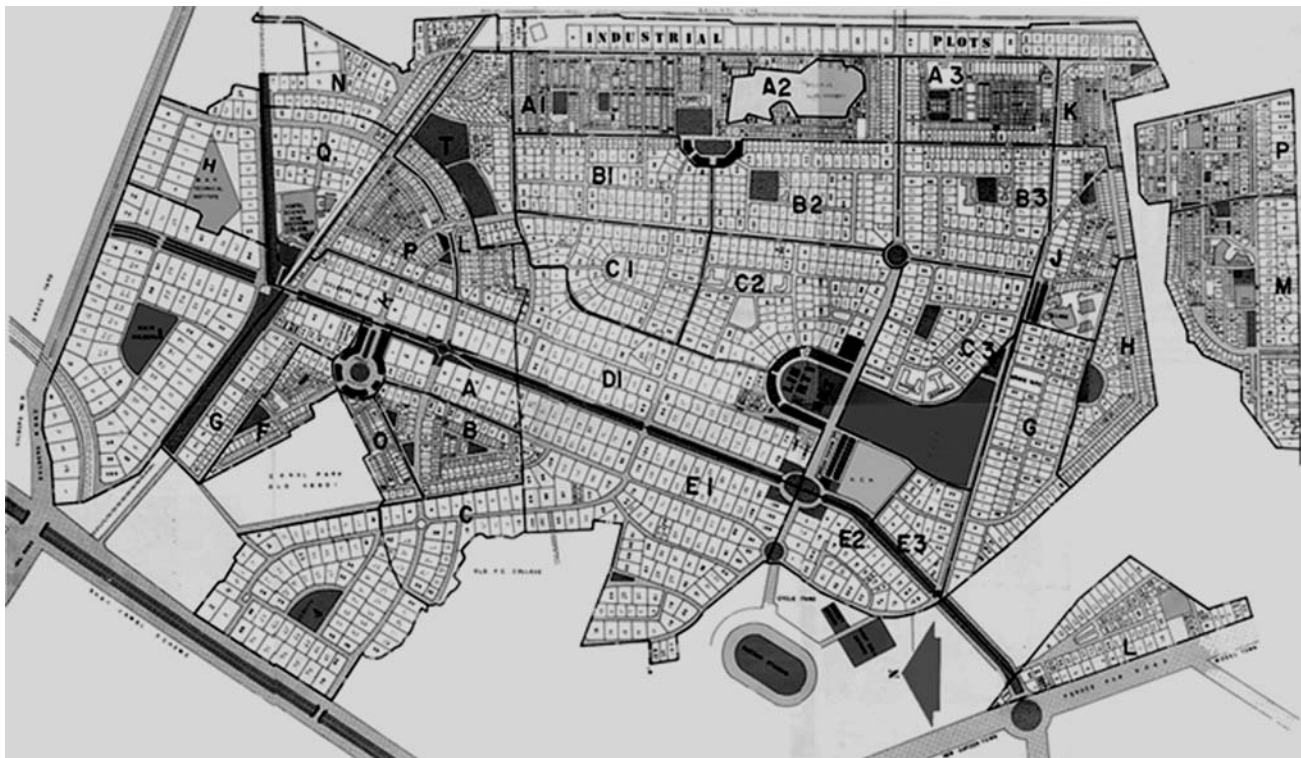


Figure-1: S.A. Raheem Master Plan of Gulberg Scheme developed during (1951-54)

3 Lahore Improvement Trust (1956), Lahore today and tomorrow, LIT.

4 Gideon, S. (1963) Space, Time and Architecture: teh growth of a new tradition, (4th edition), Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, pp. 660.

Jail Road and the Main Market Junction. With the completion of Gulberg III, the Main Boulevard acquired its present length. "It has two main carriage ways and two service roads for its two-third length with green verges planted with ornamental trees. In the remaining one-third length, the service roads have been omitted as a measure of economy reducing to 80 feet with proportionate increase in the central green belt. It is equipped with florescent lights and two beautiful fountains, one at either end decorated with multicoloured lights"⁵. It was lined with spacious residential plots ranging from 8-12 Kanals [Figure 2]. The design of residences illustrate the combination of the European and Indian building elements in private residential architecture [Figure 4-a, b]. However, during the last quarter of 20th century, single storeyed spacious residences were being pulled down to pave way for the commercial plazas. Over the years, it has turned into a business hub connecting two major arteries Jail Road and Ferozpur Road which in turn links with other adjacent area. The change in the character was mainly the result of economic boom and Commercialization Policy of the Punjab Government.

ECONOMIC BOOM

Urban development projects and construction business are directly associated with economic prosperity of the country. The Middle East and 9/11 economic booms have contributed in a significant way to the social transformation of Lahore. The Middle East boom lasted for a decade and a half (1975-1990) that resulted from the sharp increase in the price of oil starting in 1974 and by the time of the 1991 Gulf War, it had run its course. "By the mid-1980s, when this temporary migration was at its height, there were estimated to be more than 2 million Pakistanis in the Persian Gulf states remitting more than US\$3 billion every year. At the peak, the remittances accounted for almost half of the country's foreign-exchange earnings"⁶. While the events of 11 September 2001 created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion among Pakistani expatriates living in the US, the benefits back home became increasingly noticeable. Many wealthy Pakistanis in America responded to increase monitoring of wealth and assets, particularly owned by Muslims, by sending a substantial part of their savings back home. The

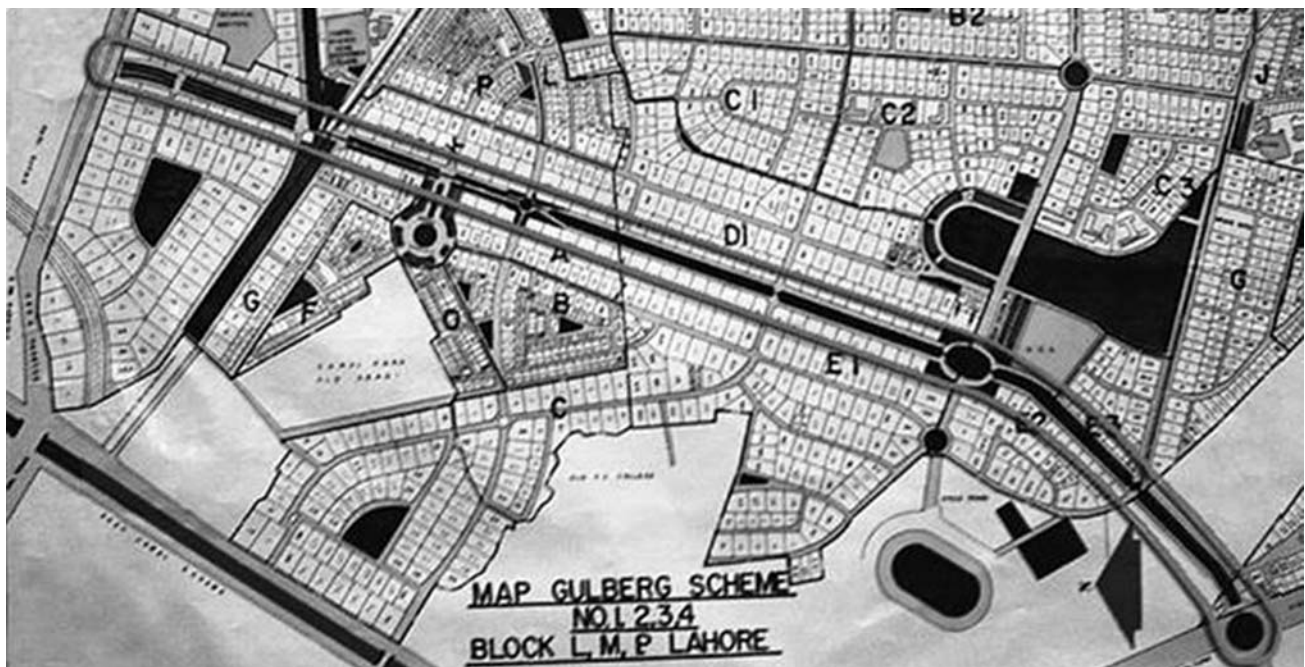


Figure-2: Alignment of Main Boulevard, Gulberg, Lahore

- 5 Gideion, S. (1963) *Space, Time and Architecture: teh growth of a new tradition*, (4th edition), Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, pp. 660.
- 6 Accessed on 10-09-2007.



Figure 3-a, b: View of Liberty Market at the time of development. (A-Left, B-Right).
(Source: Courtesy of Prof. Pervaiz Vandal)



Figure 4-a, b: View of Main Boulevard, Gulberg and Gulberg Colony at the time of development. (A-Left, B-Right)



Figure 5-a, b: Style of spacious residences constructed at the time of development. (A-Left, B-Right)

wealth flowing into Pakistan is considered second to the boom created by money sent back to the country by its blue-collar workers in the Middle East in the 1980s. The economic boom generated property boom in Lahore. The price of the real estate went up by as much as 1,000% in the city in the last five years⁷. The boom has led to the mushrooming of housing suburbs on the outskirts of Lahore and commercial plazas along major city roads without any proper planning.

COMMERCIALIZATION POLICY

Lahore Development Authority (LDA) along with City District Government Lahore (CDGL) is responsible to establish a continuous process of planning and development of the metropolitan area. The LDA notified its building regulations for the first time in 1976. These regulations were amended and printed in 1984, with further amendments in 1997 and additional amendments in 2004 notified in the Punjab Gazette. LDA Building Regulations 2005 is the first comprehensive booklet for the guidance and convenience of public, architects, planners and builders⁸. A meeting was held in December 1981 to deliberate on main issues which could emerge as a consequence of the Commercialization Policy. The committee members were apprehensive about the commercialization of residential plots and pointed out that it would have adverse effects on the environment of residential neighbourhoods. Residents were likely to pay a small amount of commercialization fee and use the premises for opening shops. This would in turn reduce the importance and the concentration of activity in the main commercial areas, which were supposed to be kept alive for efficient and well coordinated commercial functions.

Under the regulation 96-A 4, of the Punjab Gazette, properties abutting on Main Boulevard, Gulberg along with other major roads were subjected to change of land use⁹. The land use conversion started creeping in the area when a residence was

converted to Shanghai Restaurant in 1970 and the Auriga Cinema was dismantled to make way for the Auriga Plaza in late 70s. The commercialization initially started as a connivance between the land owner and LDA. This was regularized in 1993 by the Commercialization Policy clause-(iv, viii) which allowed commercialization of all residential areas subject to No Objection Certificate from the owners of all the adjoining properties and payment of a commercialization fee at the rate of 25 percent of the prevailing market rates of the commercial plots in the area. The commercialization was accelerated by the regularization of all previous unauthorized commercialization in 2001 by the Governor of Punjab as under:

*"Existing unauthorized commercialization may be regularized by the commercialization committee on payment of the prescribed commercialization fee plus 10% surcharge. This shall be done subject to the condition that there is (i) no encroachment on public utility sites; (ii) violation of building by-laws if any has been compounded; and (iii) fee due from an owner for a parking plaza where one has been constructed by a development authority has been deposited by him."*¹⁰

During 1995, it was observed that properties located on Main Boulevards in Gulberg, New Garden Town and Allama Iqbal were under pressure for land use conversion. However, the landuse change was retarded due to difficulties in the procurement of No Objection Certificates (NOC) from the adjoining areas. In a summary to the Chief Minister in 1995, a proposal was submitted to relax Clause (viii). The Chief Minister in a letter dated 27-4-1996 relaxed the condition subject to prior permission of the Chief Minister/Chairman LDA. This step helped the private sector to freely participate in urban development process and to enhance the pace of commercialization. The process of commercialization got a further boost with the LDA "Public Friendly Commercialization Policy" announced in 2001.¹¹ Relaxation in the building

7 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5338402.stm (Accessed on 07-09-2007).

8 Lahore Development Authority, Building Regulations 2005.

9 Saleem U. "Re-Development of Main Boulevard Gulberg" Unpublished B. Arch Thesis, 1998, pp. 112.

10 Notification No. SO(D-11) 5-2/81/VOL-II (rule k), Govt. of the Punjab, Housing Urban Development and Public Health Engineering Department, July 2, 2001.

11 LDA Brochure, "Public Friendly Commercialization Policy" 2001.

height brought subsequent increase in the plazas height from 38 feet till 1983 to 70 feet in 1995 and 200 feet after 2001.

The economic boom coupled with commercialization have brought drastic changes in the social and physical fabric of Lahore. Commercial plazas are one of the signs of the ostentatious new rich, showing off money and shift from the traditional shopping patterns. This change made its first appearance in 1976 when Shalimar Departmental Store and Panorama Plaza on the Mall Road were constructed. Multi-storey construction was installed there by the conservative attitude of the development authorities in an effort to retain the historic character of the Mall. Consequently, Main Boulevard, Gulberg attracted investors due to its commercial potential and became a niche for towering plazas. Thus owners of the residences were further attracted to put their houses on sale and such advertisements appeared on the internet as such¹².

"8 kanal house is available for sale in Gulberg main boulevard, best for plaza and shopping mall, a good chance for builders and companies for PKR 640, 000, 000".

MAIN BOULEVARD FROM 1980 ONWARD

Advent of globalization has directly affected almost every walk of life. Lahore has become a hot bed of multinational companies, banks, telecommunication companies and international food chains. Huge investments particularly after 9/11, have targeted Lahore and the city's skyline is changing from low-rise to high-rise. The Gulberg area once known for its serenity gave way to rampant commercialization from 1980 onward. Revamped structures of old residences gave way to profitable land use conversion. The international food chain McDonald's was opened in 1998, opening ceremony of which was like a big festival and became a trend setter for the others to follow. Mian Shahbaz Sharif, Ex. Chief Minister of Punjab carried the redevelopment work in 1999 and the Main Boulevard, Gulberg acquired a new charisma.

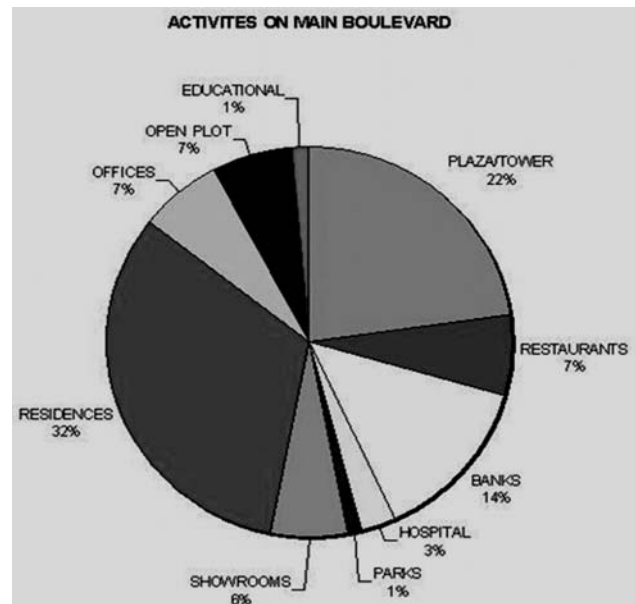


Figure-6: Comparative Analysis of Activities on Main Boulevard, Gulberg in 2006

The survey conducted in 2006 by Architects Imran Hussain and Rizwan Manzur, illustrates that currently 70 to 80 percent of Gulberg has been commercialized and the remaining is destined to change¹³. The survey revealed that residences remaining are 50 in number, constructed and under construction plazas are 32, banks 21, vacant plots after the demolition of residences 10 and restaurants on detached plots are 10 in total. (excludes restaurants in plazas) [Figure 6].

Another striking feature is the shift in the shopping and retail activities in Lahore. In the limited alternate investment opportunities, the shopping malls have attracted sizable investment in both white and black money. Liberty and Main Market originally designed for the residents of Gulberg have turned into national level markets. Liberty Market, named after the Liberty Cinema in its vicinity, is a hub of fashion industry. People not only from different parts of Lahore but across the country consider it a matter of pride to visit this market. Gradually, services clustered around these magnets spilled over and invaded Main Boulevard. Its skyline is now grappling with multi-storeyed commercial plazas with offices, apartments and

¹² http://www.zameen.com/Homes/Lahore_Gulberg-7-1.html (Accessed on 12-08-2007).

¹³ Manzur, R. & Hussain, I. "Main Boulevard Gulberg: Commercialization and Traffic Problems". M. Arch., Term report, 2006.



Figure 8: Auriga Centre



Figure 9: Hafeez Centre



Figure 10: Centre Point



Figure 11: Pace Centre

S. No.	Name of Plaza	Year of Construction	No. of Floors	Height in Ft.	Architect
Phase-1					
1	Auriga Center	1979	4	46	Wajid Associates
2	Raja Center	1984	2+5	25	Rafi Rehmani
3	Gulburg center	1987	1+3	38	Rehman & Sohail
4	Empire Center	1991	1+3	38	Assoc.
5	Center Point	1991	1+3	44	Ghayyur Obaid
6	Hafeez Center	1991	2+5	60	Navyar Ali Dada Sohail Ahmad
Phase-2					
7	Pace Departmental	1995	1+4	55	
3	Store	1997	4+11	131	Chaudhry Aslam
9	Siddique Trade Center City Tower	2000	4+11	131	Shahid Mahmood Khan Tariq Hassan
10	Phase-3	2002 UC	3+8	117	
11	Rabi Center	2003	3+6	65	Abdul Qadir
12	Lahore Center	2003	3+12	130	Mansoor Mazhar
13	Eden Tower	1999 UC	3+12	136	Shaukat Nawaz Raja
14	Big City Tower	2005 UC	4+19	200	Ghayyur Obaid
15	Boulevard Heights	2004	2+10	120	Khalid Rehman
16	Mega Towers Aashiana Shopping Center	2004 UC	3+11	132	Mansoor Mazhar Khalid Rehman
17	Center	2004-07	2+12	130	
18	Jeff Heights Alamgir Tower (UC)	2008	5+31	450	Khalid Rehman Amjad Chughtai

Table-1: List of Commercial Plazas on Main Boulevard, Gulberg, Lahore

shopping combination, restaurants, boutiques etc. [Table 1]. During 1980-1990, height of the plazas remained within 38 to 60 feet. The most mentionable are Auriga Center, Hafeez Center and Center Point [Figure 8, 9, 10]. At the turn of 20th century, Pace Center and Siddique Center became icons of the boulevard and height was excelled to 130 feet [Figure 11, 12]. Other contenders of the plaza race are City Tower, Eden Tower, Mega Tower, Big City Tower and Rabi Center [Figure 13, 14, 15, 16, 17]. All these plazas are constructed on the most strategic locations on the Main Boulevard [Figure 7]. From 2005 onward, there was further increase in height, as construction work on the 200 feet high Boulevard Heights continued to progress. The construction of plazas is in process and many more will pop up in the future. The approval of record breaking 450 feet high Alamgir Tower in the vicinity of the boulevard brought a shock to the public due to its sheer height. However, its construction work has been halted due to charges of corruption and violation

of the building by-laws.

Other than continuous increase in the height limit and land use changes, owners of these plazas, being influential people did not follow the site planning criteria and violated the approved plans. The builders in an effort to increase saleable area encroached upon the essential circulation space and added more basement floors than the approved number. In the long run, such violations did not create healthy shopping and entertainment environment. Outcomes of these developments are gradually pressurizing the infrastructure, surrounding communities, and the overall urban life of Lahore. With extremely few exceptions, provision of car parking is not accounted for in the design. As a result, frontage of most of the plazas remains a cluttered space. Thus people are left with no choice but to use the roadside lanes creating hindrance in the smooth flow of traffic. The boulevard seems to be on wheels and in a spin virtually all the time and cannot hold mammoth



Figure 12: Siddique Centre



Figure 13: Mega Tower



Figure 14: City Tower 2000



Figure 15: Eden Tower 2003



Figure 16: Big City Tower



Figure 17: Rabbi Centre

flow of vehicles. During peak hours of office and school traffic, situation becomes worse. Lack of driving and traffic sense makes the state of affairs more miserable. What was previously a ten minutes drive has now easily stretched into a half an hour of nerve-shattering experience. Ramps for the movement of the disabled, fire exits, stand by power generators are the other common deficiencies.

In response to the chaotic conditions generated by the violation of building by-laws, High-Rise Building Commission was established in May 2007 by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The main objective was to investigate high-rise buildings in Lahore in terms of legal requirements, safety factors and citizen rights. In the light of commission report, the Supreme Court bench in July 2007 issued notice to the owners of 13 plazas in the city that were constructed in violation of building by-laws. The Bench also ordered the owner of Alamgir Tower, Gulberg, to fill six basements of the tower, which were constructed in violation of the by-laws and imposed fine of Rs. 5 Million¹⁴.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

City neighborhoods with its multifarious facets represent the transition of human values into physical forms. Changes in the living patterns continue to show up in a symbolized form in architecture. As land values along main thoroughfares go up, some new uses have a tendency to invade and succeed the previous ones to make it profitable and Gulberg is no exception. Once it had the ambience of being away from the humdrum of city, now it brings together the commercial and luxuries, en-wrapping almost one-fourth of the total city population. Main Boulevard, which originally had single storied residences lost its character when somebody got the idea of pulling down these structures and adorning the thoroughfare with large scale plazas. Greed was perhaps the motivator and public interests were thrown away like a worn-out garment.

As a result of the Commercialization Policy and

real estate business, tall, gigantic shopping centers the erupted along both its sides. Till 1983, it was being practiced arbitrarily on individual basis and no definite guidelines were available. Initially, the committee was apprehensive about the growth of commercial activity spread all over the residential area. However, soon it came under the grip of real estate business due to its potential in advertisement. Consequently, vehicular load has increased and traffic jams have become a common scene especially during weekdays and school hours. Due to non-availability of parking space, people have to face embarrassment. The nuisance may become a dilemma if parking facilities are not improved to handle the rapidly increasing number of vehicles. Sprouting up of a number of huge modernistic hoardings and neon signs is adversely affecting the visual quality of the built environment. Moreover, effects of these plazas on different income groups are alarming. The middle class in an attempt to copy the elite spend more than what they can afford and hence face financial difficulties. People going to local markets are looked down as inferior and backward.

Almost everyone has seen these changes at the local level but without clear understanding of their impacts. But the older professionals with a vision are apprehensive about this rapid transformation. Kamil Khan Mumtaz, a prominent architect, conservationist and a member of High Rise Building Commission in an interview strongly condemned mushrooming of plazas on the Main Boulevard, Gulberg¹⁵. He stated that in a country where public riots are being launched against the power breakdown and system dealing with the emergency is defective, the unchecked growth of high-rise buildings could be cumbersome. The result of this commercialization which is global as well as local would bring destruction to our planet. He warned that going beyond five storeys could be devastating especially during emergencies.

Professor Sattar Sikander, an academic and a planner is also apprehensive about the unchecked growth of commercialization in Lahore¹⁶. He warned that the Commercialization Policy has ruined the

14 Daily Times, July 8, 2007.

15 Interview with Kamil Khan Mumtaz on 05-09-2007.

16 Interview with Prof. Sattar Sikandar on 06-09-2006.

city of Lahore. He said it is ironic that policy makers are not aware of the relationship between the traffic type, volume and land use conversion. He pointed out that commercial land-use enhances the traffic load to 50 times. In addition, linear type of commercialization is not recommended anywhere in the world and is separated from the main thoroughfares through collectors for smooth flow of traffic. However, Professor Pervaiz Vandal, architect and academician, and also a resident of Gulberg has a mild approach. He considers that change is inevitable and high-rise buildings is the only alternate available in future¹⁷. The commercialization has been triggered by the rapid expansion in the economy and change in the living pattern of Lahoriites. As the authorities were reluctant to allow high-rise buildings on the Mall Road therefore the Main Boulevard, on Gulberg was the next available nexus. According to him, the issue is not of height but of provision and maintenance of proper infrastructure services for sustainable development.

Some of the prerequisite of high-rise architecture is to provide the highest quality in design, safety in construction, convenience and high service standards, fully equipped with all modern amenities. Major challenge for the architects is to conceive ways in which commercial spaces are designed not only to be functionally effective and aesthetically appealing but responsive to the inevitable changes taking place in the business world. To address all these issues effectively, it is high time that guidelines for the development on commercial plazas be formulated. The author fully supports the view of Professor Noman Ahmad. In his article "Architecture of Shopping Malls" he stated:

"The city government... should initiate scientific studies to assess the impacts of land use conversion and commercialization... After the technical and financial aspects are adequately cross examined vis-a-vis the proposed land allocation solutions, a public hearing should be conducted to obtain feedback of stakeholders... In addition, the professional and statutory bodies of architects must devise good design practices in commercial

*space. This shall be beneficial both for the clients, builders, people and city at large"*¹⁸.

There is a realization that to see the real city, one does not look at its great skyscrapers, shopping promenades and boulevards but at the quality of life of the people living there. In the light of the foregoing discussion, it is concluded that commercial enterprises, real estate business, corruption in building industry and ineffective building by-laws are adversely affecting the quality of life in Lahore. The decision of the Punjab Government of relaxation in the land-use conversion on the Main Boulevard, Gulberg along with other thoroughfares have started bearing bitter fruits. Many modern institutions and program find their way into the city advising on traffic control, preparing master plans, computerizing local accounts, installing modern management system. Nonetheless, the results have been disappointing. Despite all the magnificent commercial projects glittered with fancy materials, Gulberg is becoming unlivable. The residents consider the present Gulberg as a mere shadow of its past.

The quote "God made the country, man made the town", goes back centuries to Vergil, one of the greatest Roman poets, adds further value to the argument. There is the need to accept our responsibility and to discourage the unbridled importation of the west, respecting the internal dynamics of the area to retain its green character as manifested in its name. It is a major challenge now for the policy makers, to create a balanced relationship between economic development and environmental sustainability. Environmental conservation and economic progress should not conflict with each other but exist in perfect harmony and accord. Could Main Boulevard, Gulberg be transformed into a friendly pedestrian City Business District? Surely, the solution lies in judicious thinking.

17 Interview with Prof. Pervaiz Vandal on 06-08-2007.

18 Ahmad, N. "Architecture of Shopping Malls", ARCHI TIMES, Vol. 22, No. 6, 2007.

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